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LATIN MATERIALS FOR THE INNER-CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL.

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IN KEEPING WITH AMERICA'S CURRENT CONCERN FOR ITS BIG CITIES, THE CLASSICISTS, STIMULATED BY THE INAPPROPRIATENESS OF THE LATIN TEXTS CURRENTLY AVAILABLE AND THE CONSEQUENT DECLINE IN LATIN ENROLLMENT IN URBAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS, ARE REALIZING THE NEED TO DEVELOP A COMPLETE SERIES OF TEXTBOOKS AND MATERIALS DESIGNED FOR INNER-CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL CHILDREN. TO WHET THE DISADVANTAGED CHILD'S APPETITE FOR STUDY, THE SERIES MUST REALISTICALLY BE AIMED AT THE AVERAGE OR BELOW-AVERAGE STUDENT WHO REQUIRES A MUCH MORE GRADUAL APPROACH TO LEARNING. SUCH A SERIES, TO BE EFFECTIVE, SHOULD MAKE PROVISION FOR ORAL WORK AND ABUNDANT MULTISENSORY AIDS. TO COMBAT THE PROBLEMS OF CULTURAL DEPRIVATION AND ENGLISH VERBAL POVERTY, THE MATERIALS SHOULD EMPHASIZE VIVIDLY PRESENTED CULTURAL MATERIALS IN ENGLISH AND WORD AND DERIVATION STUDIES. READINGS DRAWN FROM THE ENTIRE SPECTRUM OF LATIN LITERATURE SHOULD BE GEARED TO THE URBAN STUDENT'S INTERESTS AND MIGHT POSSIBLY STRESS THE AFRICAN ASPECTS OF CLASSICAL CIVILIZATION. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "THE CLASSICAL OUTLOOK," VOLUME 45, NUMBER 6, FEBRUARY 1968, PAGES 61-62. (AB)

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LATIN MATERIALS FOR THE INNER-CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL

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America is becoming more and more conscious of the needs of its large cities. America's classicists are becoming more and more conscious of the needs of Latin in the big city public-school system. One of the most acute of these needs is for a complete series of textbooks and materials specifically geared to inner-city public-school children. It is the purpose of this article to examine in detail why such a series is necessary, what its general characteristics should be, and, very briefly, how it might become a reality. Obviously, much that will be said must be subjective. However, the author has communicated on the matter with many urban teachers and other knowledgeable persons, and so his opinion is at least an informed one.

Why special materials?

One reason is that the traditional Latin textbooks are not meeting the needs of the type of youngster that one finds in the inner-city public schools. The books currently on the market are directed at the interests and aptitudes of affluent, well-motivated students in private preparatory schools and the so-called good public schools of white suburbia, or at the special needs of the parochial schools. I am not denigrating these books but merely stating that they are not adapted to the needs of inner-city public-school children — although some are obviously better than others in this regard. Some presently available materials have been used very effectively in an inner-city situation—with sweeping adaptations and supplements—by creative teachers such as Mrs. Eula Gayl Cutt of the Detroit public schools and the various teachers of the Washington, D. C., public schools under the leadership of Dr. Judith Le Bovit, Language Department Supervising Director. But a complete series of books and materials specifically designed for inner-city public-school children would not only be much more convenient and probably more effective but also would stand a much better chance of being widely used by urban school districts.

Another reason is the catastrophic decline of Latin in the urban public schools. It is becoming a well-known fact that Latin is at its weakest here. There are many reasons for this weakness (e.g., the lack of teachers), but even the shortest list would have to include the absence of materials suited to the needs of urban children. Developing these materials is a *sine qua non* if our subject is to flourish or even survive in the big cities. And with America becoming more and more urbanized we cannot realistically ignore the cities.

What should be the general characteristics of a series specifically geared to the inner-city public schools?

1) There must be provision for Latin in grades 7 and 8 and in the elementary schools. The Airlie and Oxford Conferences have established beyond doubt the desirability and necessity of Latin at these levels in all types of school systems. Any argument in favor of Latin here generally applies *a fortiori* to the urban public-school system. The typical child in the inner-city system—for reasons I shall give later—requires a much slower and more gradual approach to any subject than his counterpart in suburbia.

2) The series must be aimed at average and below-average students rather than at the academically talented. The philosophy of education dominating our big city public schools is basically egalitarian and utterly rejects the "educate-the-best-and-the-hell-with-the-rest" type of thinking that prevails in some educational institutions. It is a well-known fact that administrators and community leaders in the big cities tend to look disapprovingly at subjects that are only for the intellectual elite. We must accept this philosophy not merely because it is the dominant one but also because it is the only correct, rational, humane, and humanistic one for the public schools.

We must be honest in what we expect to accomplish with inner-city youngsters. Can we realistically expect a child from a squalid poverty area, who may not know from where his next meal is coming, who has no books in his home, and who gets no encouragement in his intellectual pursuits from his parents and his environment to accomplish as much as an affluent student coming from an environment that puts great stress on intellectual achievement? Of course not. We must recognize that unfortunate socio-economic conditions make such achievement difficult for many public-school children in the big cities. What we must do is to whet the appetite of the disadvantaged child for study—not to overwhelm him with standards which through no fault of his own are impossibly high for him. It is worth noting that in other disciplines, including the modern languages, there are text-books aimed at the average or below-average child of the inner city. Why not in our field?

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I advocate then a much more gradual approach to Latin for inner-city children. It may well be that what by traditional standards is covered in one year will have to be covered in two. Also, exercises must be easier than those found in the standard books; translating complicated English sentences into Latin is simply beyond the ability of many urban children (as well as being boring to almost all children). Readings must be fully annotated, with plenty of translation aids. Putting inadequately annotated readings into the hands of culturally deprived students is bound to create discouragement, loss of self-confidence, and a deep-seated hatred for Latin. Some may call this approach "watering-down" or "prostitution of the classics," but I firmly believe that the treasures of Greece and Rome belong to all mankind — not just to a small cerebral clique. These treasures must be made available in suitable form to all who can profit from them —including the average and below-average boys and girls of the inner-city public schools.

3) The series should make much provision for oral work. Our friends in the modern languages have discovered that even students of low ability are able to derive pleasure and profit from language study when an aural-oral approach is employed. Slower students seem to enjoy pronouncing and eventually memorizing phrases, expressions, dialogues, proverbs, etc. Why not capitalize on this enjoyment, particularly at the early stages of Latin instruction? I am not advocating that we spend time teaching children how to order Coca Cola in Latin or how to converse in Latin about their favorite TV programs. But is it really wrong to use oral Latin in giving classroom directions, to insist that our students be able to pronounce the language and hear its magnificent roll and cadence, and to memorize famous quotations and expressions from Latin literature? I personally feel that the silent, "dead" approach to Latin, where the student rarely hears a word of Latin uttered in the classroom, is an abomination under any circumstances, and tends to remove much of the esthetic pleasure that should be gained from reading Latin literature in the original. But if there is any place where oral Latin is particularly important and necessary, it is in the classroom of the big city public school.

4) There must be abundant multi-sensory aids (films, filmstrips, tapes, etc.) to accompany the basic textbook. Urban children—more so than others —are television- and radio-oriented. Bookish approaches to any subject do not work well with them. We need audio-visual materials to make our subject dynamic and alive for urban children. The cultural filmstrips and sound films that accompany Britannica's new *Artes Latinae* course are a step in the right direction, but much more in a similar vein is needed. The objection that audio-visual realia are prohibitively expensive no longer seems valid now that the federal government is willing to underwrite the cost of such material.

5) Our series must have abundant cultural materials in English dealing with classical history, literature, art, mythology, etc., and with their impact on our own culture. In other words, we must teach Classical Studies as well as the mere facts of the Latin language. This aspect must be treated not as something incidental, as it is in many standard textbooks, but as an integral and important part of the course. The political, moral, and esthetic relevance of Greece and Rome must be made real and vivid. There is no reason why such cultural material cannot be drawn largely from the ancient sources themselves. Important passages from the literature deemed too difficult or too lengthy to be read in the original can be given in translation. The cultural values connected with the study of Latin are particularly important in the urban milieu, where the problem of cultural deprivation is a real issue; therefore we must underscore these values.

6) Heavy emphasis must be placed on word study and derivation. Many urban educational administrators are impressed by Latin's potential for remedying English verbal poverty. Yet the typical Latin textbook treats derivative work in a very incidental way. One of the greatest handicaps that an inner-city child faces is his lack of skill in handling his mother tongue. A study of Latin roots, prefixes, and suffixes can be an important remedy for this handicap. Such study must be approached thoroughly and systematically.

7) Our textbooks must contain readings of interest to urban children and drawn from the entire spectrum of Latin literature—including the post-classical period. In other disciplines (e.g., English and history) textbooks are being produced with greater emphasis on our African heritage in order to imbue Negro boys and girls with a sense of ancestral pride and self-respect. Latin books designed for urban use might stress the specifically African aspect of classical civilization. They might include materials drawn from such African authors as Terence, Apuleius, and St. Augustine; readings dealing with slavery and minority-group treatments in the Roman empire would also be timely and relevant for inner-city children.

8) There must be provision for individualized instruction and programmed learning. This provision is particularly important since there are commonly wide variations in ability in the urban classroom. In any case, instructional materials must be suitable for the large classes characteristic of the urban public school and adapted to its physical realities.

How can these materials become a reality?

Perhaps some Maecenas will read this article and lend his assistance. Perhaps a publishing company will realize the potentialities involved here. Perhaps the development of such books and materials is a project worthy of federal financing. I am not sure how we should go about developing these innovative materials, but I am sure that they must be developed.